

Lesson Plan # 2: Women of the Holocaust

Hearing The Words - Through Poetry

Designed by Esther Hexter and Barbara White



Hannah Senesh [Szenes] (1921-1944)

Hannah Senesh was a Hungarian Jew who moved to Mandatory Palestine in 1939. She joined the British Army in 1943 and, as one of 37 Jews, volunteered to parachute into Yugoslavia to assist in the rescue of British pilots and she hoped help Hungarian Jews. Arrested, imprisoned and tortured, she was put to death by firing squad. She is regarded by many as a great heroine. We have her diary and a number of her poems, two of which follow.

***Blessed is the match, consumed in kindling flame.
Blessed is the flame that burns in the heart's secret places.
Blessed is the heart that knows, for honors sake, to stop its beating.
Blessed is the match, consumed in kindling flame.***

Written: Serdice, Yugoslavia May 1944, days before her capture

Selected Resources:

Biographies: <http://www.jewishmag.com/55mag/senesh/senesh.htm>
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/szenes.html>

Blessed is the Match, the Life and Death of Hannah Senesh, A Facing History and Ourselves Study Guide
A teaching curriculum about Hannah Senesh that includes poem, *Blessed is the Match*. Available on line:
www.facinghistory.org/publications.

***There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth
though they have long been extinct.
There are people whose brilliance continues to light
the world even though they are not longer among the living.
These lights are particularly bright
when the night is dark.
They light the way for human kind.***

From letter written to her mother's family in Dombovar, Hungary upon the death of her great-aunt Betti Mama, September, 1940. Quoted in *Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary, the First Complete Edition*, edited by Roberta Grossman, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004

Lesson Plan:

1. Read brief notes about Hannah Senesh's life above. To find out more, go to the biographies in Selected Resources above.

What do you think were the conditions under which Senesh wrote these two poems? What do you think was happening in her life at the time? Note dates of writing at end of each poem.

2. Read both poems aloud. Listen to the words and thoughts expressed in each of them.

3. Light (flame) is an image in both poems.

How does the poet use light in each poem? Why do you think she chose to use light?

Does light mean the same thing in each poem? How is it similar? How different?

3. What do these words mean?

Idealism –

Commitment –

Courage –

How are they expressed in *Blessed is the Match*?

4. Think about someone you know who has shown idealism, commitment or courage. Write a poem or paragraph story about him or her.